



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



BILL INTRODUCED TO EXTEND MISSION ACT DEADLINE

U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds and Joe Manchin, members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced the *Veterans Affairs Saving Network Appointments From Upheaval Act*, otherwise known as the "VA SNAFU Act," which would delay the implementation of new access standards for non-VA healthcare providers.

"The men and women who wore the uniform of the United States have earned the benefits they were promised," said Rounds. "Our legislation seeks to make sure the transition from the Veterans Choice Program to the Veterans Community Care Program, as outlined in the VA MISSION Act, does not adversely impact veterans. The VA must continue to provide care and services to eligible veterans throughout the transition period. Our bill also automatically enrolls veterans exposed to toxic airborne chemicals or stationed near open burn pits into the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, unless they choose to opt out. This will make it easier for those veterans to receive adequate care and updates pertinent to them in a timely manner. Our nation's veterans served our country and we owe it to them to make sure they are properly taken care of."

On June 6th, as directed by the VA MISSION Act of 2018, millions of veterans will be forced to navigate new access standards for non-VA healthcare providers. Senators Rounds and Manchin are concerned that the VA has not taken enough time to properly plan and prepare its staff, systems and community networks for the implementation of the proposed access standards.

Specifically, the market assessments of community care providers which were designed to make sure that the system was ready for the transition are only now just getting underway. The senators are concerned the VA may not be able to certify and tell veterans whether community providers across the country will provide as-good or better care than VA facilities.

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REDMOND HONORED FOR HER DEDICATED SERVICE



Last Thursday, veterans, elected officials and community leaders gathered in Sioux Falls to honor a very special woman—Shirley Redmond. Shirley has dedicated her life to improving the lives of our veterans.

Governor Kristi Noem proclaimed May 30th as “Shirley Redmond Day” in South Dakota. The Governor stated “South Dakota was founded with hard work, perseverance, dedication to duty, and concern for others, and each of these attributes can be ascribed to Shirley. Her support of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs staff, their mission, and South Dakota’s Veterans Service



Officers is unending and very much valued.”

“Shirley’s retirement has come with mixed emotions for me,” said SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Polard. “While I’m happy to see her begin the next chapter of her life, it comes with the realization that we won’t have her commitment and reliability when helping our veterans. Shirley has played a major role in my journey of helping America’s heroes, and I wish her only the best as she starts a new journey.”

Perhaps Maya Angelou said it best—“I think a hero is any person really intent on making this a better place for all people.”

Thanks Shirley for being one of our heroes! You will be missed!

DEWEY COUNTY BECOMES PURPLE HEART COUNTY

Dewey County becomes a “Purple Heart County.”

Ken Teunissen, State Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart of the Dakotas, presented Dewey County Commissioners with the honorary signs.



MESSAGE FROM VA SECRETARY ROBERT WILKIE

I want to call attention to several inaccuracies in a recent media [“fact check”](#) article that claimed the Trump administration is taking credit for progress made under the Obama administration.

This unfortunate piece went out of its way to misinterpret President Trump and my own words. Worse, it gets basic facts wrong in a way that could create a disincentive for Veterans to seek care at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We should all be encouraging our Veterans to use our hospitals and clinics, but pieces such as these paint an incorrect picture of the VA that runs the risk of discouraging Veterans from using the benefits they have earned.

For example:

1. The piece criticized President Trump for saying, “we passed VA choice and VA accountability,” and for saying people have been “trying to pass these things for 45 years.” AP concluded Trump was “wrong” because “Trump is not the first president in 45 years to get Congress to pass Veterans Choice.”

The President knows what he was talking about, even if the AP doesn’t. In 2018, President Trump signed into law the MISSION Act, which gives VA the ability to implement the best practices we’ve learned in our nearly 75 years of experience offering community care. It consolidates VA’s community care efforts into a single, simple-to-use program that puts Veterans at the center of their VA health care decisions.

He wasn’t referring to the Veterans Choice Act, which became law under the Obama administration and created a narrow, temporary choice program that wasn’t seen by anyone as a final answer. Either through neglect or willful ignorance, the AP quoted the President as referring to “VA Choice,” with a capital C, as if he meant that Obama-era bill, but he was referring to the concept of choice as defined in the MISSION Act.

Also, the piece conveniently leaves out the fact that President Trump signed the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017, one of the most significant changes to civil service laws since the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 was passed more than four decades ago.

2. Along the way to making that flawed argument, the AP misinterpreted a statement made by the VA’s top health official, Dr. Richard Stone, who said implementation of the MISSION Act should “almost be a non-event.” The AP took that line out of context and imagined it to mean that few Veterans will choose care outside the VA because wait times are longer in the private sector, in an apparent effort to dismiss the value of the law the President signed.

That’s news to Dr. Stone. We checked with him, and he said his “non-event” comment referred to the idea that implementation of the MISSION Act would not create any technical problems that would interrupt Veterans’ efforts to seek care at the VA. He made the comment in Senate testimony in March, after being asked whether the MISSION Act would create any drastic changes to how Veterans interact with their VA providers.

3. The piece said the “key to the Choice program’s success is an overhaul of the VA’s electronic medical records,” which will take up to 10 years. It also said I have estimated that full implementation of the “expanded Choice program” is still years away.

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WILKIE MESSAGE (CONTINUED)

The Choice program will actually cease to exist on June 6, as the MISSION Act will create a new program that consolidates all of VA's community care programs, including Choice. The AP's "fact checkers" seem unaware of this crucial fact.

Also, while electronic health records modernization is an important improvement, it's not central to the success of the MISSION Act. No one from the VA has ever said implementation of the new private care option Veterans will have under the MISSION Act is "years" away because of our effort to modernize health records.

4. The AP quoted me saying I took steps to make sure Veterans are at the center of their health care decisions, and connected that quote to another one in which I said, "One of the things that we're doing at VA is that we have same-day mental health service."

But in the Fox News interview, those two comments happened about six minutes apart from each other. The AP ignored the back and forth of the interview for that long and misleadingly made it appear as if this was a single, related thought.

5. Finally, the piece quoted me saying that my effort to put dedicated leaders in our VA hospitals and clinics helped reduce VA wait times, as seen in a Journal of the American Medical Association study.

The AP is correct: that study measured wait times up until 2017, before my tenure. VA is seeing enough signs of improvement that it's easy to confuse data sources under the hot lights of a TV set.

What I should have said was, we have our own internal data showing that wait times are continuing to improve since President Trump took office.

Our own data show the VA has completed more than 1.2 million more appointments through May 21 in FY 2019 compared to the same period the prior year, a sign our success in hiring more medical staff is bearing fruit for our Veterans.

Wait times for new primary and mental health care appointments have also fallen since President Trump took office

VA NABS FOUR TELLY AWARDS FOR VIRTUAL CARE EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS

As a result of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) efforts to educate and help veterans better understand health care services available to them, the VA's Office of Connected Care (OCC) recently won four [Telly Awards](#) for educational videos highlighting the department's virtual care experience.

The awards, which were presented May 21, honor excellence in video and television made for all screens.

"These videos help veterans better understand telehealth treatment and how they can form meaningful connections through VA virtual care services," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This type of storytelling has been an essential part of bringing high-quality health care to veterans, no matter where they choose to live, work and thrive."

The annual competition is judged by leading video and television experts. OCC's awards were for the three following videos:

[Connected Care's Vision](#)

Gold winner, online commercials – Motion Graphics Design

[Connected Care: A Comprehensive Care Experience](#)

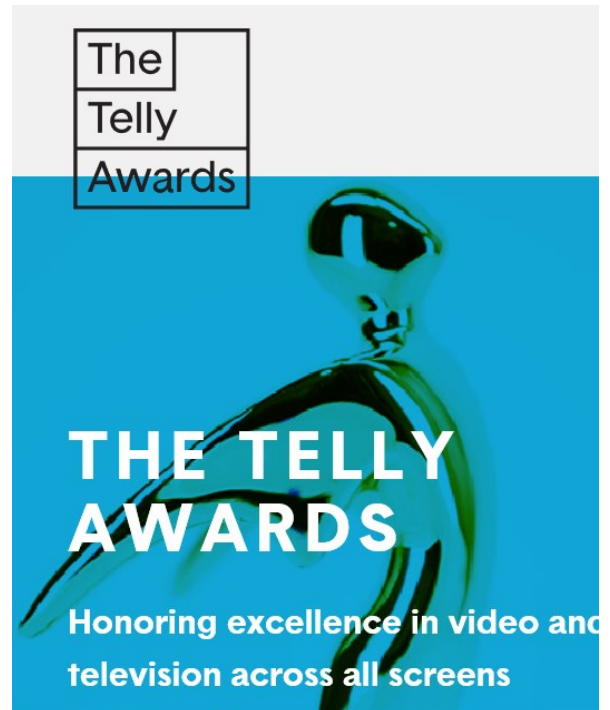
Bronze winner, online commercials – Institutional/Corporate Image

Bronze winner, Online Commercials – Public Interest/Awareness

[Telehealth proves its worth, saving life and limb in the aftermath of hurricane](#)

Bronze winner, online commercials – Hospitals

The VA is the nation's largest provider of telehealth services, delivering care through more than one-million video telehealth visits in 2018. Additionally, Connected Care programs, such as [My HealtheVet](#) and [VA Mobile](#), enable veterans to take ownership of their health. To learn more about the VA's telehealth services, visit the Office of Connected Care [website](#).



“LAST OUT” PERFORMANCE

WRITTEN BY RET. LT. COL SCOTT MANN

YOU'VE HEARD THE WAR STORIES OF THE "FIRST IN."
THIS IS THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE

LAST OUT

ELEGY OF A GREEN BERET

A HEROES JOURNEY PRODUCTION

JULY 19 - 21, 2019

THOMAS H. CRAIG CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS
VERMILLION HIGH SCHOOL

TICKETS & INFORMATION AT:
WWW.LASTOUTPLAY.COM

 **SEMPER**
CAPITAL MANAGEMENT



Vermillion will be hosting the “Last Out” performance July 19 - 21, 2019.

The play deals with the issues of soldiers who are “last out” of a combat situation and the problems of military families for the Persian Gulf soldiers.

This is a national production with a professional production team and they are just getting started touring the country.

To learn more about the performance, tickets, cast, etc. please visit their website at:

www.lastoutplay.com.

SD NATIONAL GUARD CHANGE OF COMMAND

A change of command ceremony for the South Dakota National Guard is scheduled for Saturday, June 8, at 2 p.m. at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Theater.

Brig. Gen. Jeffrey P. Marlette will be promoted to the rank of major general and will take command as the SDNG's 22nd adjutant general from Maj. Gen. Timothy A. Reisch, who served in the position since April 2011.

The public is encouraged to attend the event. Gov. Kristi Noem will be in attendance and preside over the ceremony.

As adjutant general, Marlette will command the state's nearly 4,200 South Dakota Air and Army National Guard men and women with over 1,000 full-time federal and state employees. He will be responsible for strategic planning, assignment of leaders, recruiting, training, equipping, mobilization, facilities, and public relations.

He will serve as a member of Gov. Noem's cabinet leading the Department of the Military. In this capacity, he will be responsible to ensure the SDNG is trained and ready to respond to state and federal missions at all times.

Reisch will retire from the SDNG with over 40 years of military service.



NATIONAL GUARD TO HOST 35TH ANNUAL GOLDEN COYOTE

The South Dakota National Guard will host its 35th annual Golden Coyote training exercise in the Black Hills June 8–22 to provide military units with relevant training opportunities in support of overseas contingency operations and homeland defense. Created in 1984 with the cooperation of the National Forest Service and Custer State Park, this year's exercise will allow about 2,700 service members to conduct combat-support and service-support missions in a realistic training environment and provide valuable services to the public.

There will be about 40 military units from 12 states and two foreign nations (Denmark and Canada) participating in the exercise from multiple branches of military service – Army, Navy and Air Force – working together to create an invaluable training experience. Participating units conduct military operations, train on their equipment and employ tactics, and complete various humanitarian missions and engineer projects that help improve the forest and infrastructure of many communities.

Local residents receive numerous benefits from the many engineer projects conducted during the exercise. Units transport timber to Native American communities that use it as firewood, conduct building construction, repair and upgrades, identify hazardous wilderness areas and make them safe for public use, and resurface local roadways that have fallen into disrepair. exercise and remain in an all-hours-ready status.

SD GUARD BREAKS GROUND ON ARMY AVIATION READINESS CENTER

The South Dakota National Guard broke ground, May 22, on a new \$20 million Army Aviation Readiness Center, which will enhance training and readiness for National Guard forces for decades to come.

The 58,714 square foot readiness center will be adjacent to the SDNG's Army Aviation Support Facility and will feature training classrooms, administrative offices, equipment storage space and military vehicle parking.

"This ceremony represents a decade of planning to bring this facility to a reality," said Lt. Col. Martin Yost, Construction and Facilities Management Officer for the SDNG.

Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender, Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general for the SDNG, as well as senior SDNG officials and local government and business leaders, were on hand for the ceremony.

"Having the right sort of facilities in place for our Soldiers is important," said Reisch. "It's a real pleasure to be here to help break the ground for this new facility."

"The South Dakota National Guard on a global scale is a big deal and it's certainly a big deal in South Dakota and Rapid City," said Allender.

Funding for the new facility is a shared cost with \$15 million from the federal government and \$5 million from the state.

"One of the biggest ways that we can support the National Guard is with readiness," said Rhoden. "This project is an enhancement to an already outstanding organization."

"I hope the (South Dakota National Guard) sees this project as a sign that this state believes in you, and that we value the work that you do," added Rhoden. "You are the best option that South Dakota has in protecting its liberties and we will continue to support you."

In addition to providing better training and readiness capabilities for Soldiers, the state-of-the art facility is also designed to meet LEED Silver criteria – making the building energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

The readiness center will also include a geothermal heat exchanger for heating and cooling, automated temperature control monitor, anti-terrorism/force protection measures, security fencing and site lighting.

The readiness center is expected to be complete in the spring of 2021.



VA'S FINAL COMMUNITY CARE REGULATIONS UNDER MISSION ACT

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the publication in the [Federal Register](#) of two final regulations as part of its new Veterans Community Care Program under the [VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks \(MISSION\) Act](#) of 2018.

Signed into law on June 6, 2018, the MISSION Act strengthens the VA's ability to deliver trusted, easy to access, high quality care at VA facilities, virtually through telehealth, and in veterans' communities. The law makes several improvements to VA care that begin on June 6, 2019.

"President Trump promised to give veterans greater choice," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We are honoring that promise by making sure veterans have access to timely, high-quality care, whether from our VA facilities or our community providers."

A key component of the MISSION Act is a new [urgent care benefit](#) that provides eligible veterans with greater choice and access to timely, high-quality care. With urgent care, veterans have a new option for care for the treatment of minor injuries and illnesses, such as colds, sore throats and minor skin infections. The benefit is offered in addition to the opportunity to receive care from a VA provider, as VA also offers same-day services.

The VA also published the final regulation for the [Veterans Community Care Program](#) governing how eligible veterans receive necessary hospital care, medical services, and extended care services from non-VA entities or providers in the community. The new Veterans Community Care Program replaces the Veterans Choice Program, which expires June 6, 2019.

The VA previously published an interim final rule for [Veterans Care Agreements](#) (VCA) on May 14, 2019. The VA may use VCAs to order care when that care is not otherwise feasibly available through VA's contracted network. VCAs are intended to be used in limited situations. The VA will purchase most community care for veterans through its contracted network as part of its strong partnerships with third party administrators. Currently, these administrators are TriWest Healthcare Alliance and Optum Public.

The VA is implementing improvements to its community care program as required by the VA MISSION Act. Veterans can find detailed information on urgent care eligibility, community care eligibility and MISSION Act implementation at www.missionact.va.gov

VA LAUNCHES NEW HEALTH CARE OPTIONS UNDER MISSION ACT

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched its new and improved Veterans Community Care Program on June 6, 2019, implementing portions of [the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act](#) of 2018 (MISSION Act), which both ends the Veterans Choice Program and establishes a new Veterans Community Care Program.

The MISSION Act will strengthen the nationwide VA Health Care System by empowering veterans with more health care options.

“The changes not only improve our ability to provide the health care veterans need, but also when and where they need it,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It will also put veterans at the center of their care and offer options, including expanded telehealth and urgent care, so they can find the balance in the system that is right for them.”

Under the new Veterans Community Care Program, veterans can work with their VA health care provider or other VA staff to see if they are eligible to receive community care based on new criteria. Eligibility for community care does not require a veteran to receive that care in the community; Veterans can still choose to have the VA provide their care. Veterans may elect to receive care in the community if they meet any of the following six eligibility criteria:

1. A veteran needs a service not available at any VA medical facility.
2. A veteran lives in a U.S. state or territory without a full-service VA medical facility. Specifically, this would apply to veterans living in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire and the U.S. territories of Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
3. A veteran qualifies under the “[grandfather](#)” provision related to distance eligibility under the Veterans Choice Program.
4. The VA cannot furnish care within certain designated access standards. The specific access standards are described below:
 - Drive time to a specific VA medical facility.
 - Thirty-minute average drive time for primary care, mental health and noninstitutional extended care services.
 - Sixty-minute average drive time for specialty care.



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VA NEW HEALTH CARE OPTIONS UNDER MISSION ACT

(CONTINUED)

Note: Drive times are calculated using geomapping software.

- **Appointment wait time at a specific VA medical facility:**
 - Twenty days from the date of request for primary care, mental health care and noninstitutional extended care services, unless the veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
 - Twenty-eight days for specialty care from the date of request, unless the veteran agrees to a later date in consultation with his or her VA health care provider.
- 5. The veteran and the referring clinician agree it is in the best medical interest of the veteran to receive community care based on defined factors.
- 6. VA has determined that a VA medical service line is not providing care in a manner that complies with VA's standards for quality based on specific conditions.

In preparation for this landmark initiative, senior VA leaders will visit more than 30 VA hospitals across the country to provide in-person support for the rollout.

The VA MISSION Act:

- Strengthens the VA's ability to recruit and retain clinicians.
- Authorizes "[Anywhere to Anywhere](#)" telehealth across state lines.
- Empowers veterans with increased access to community care.
- Establishes a new urgent care benefit that eligible veterans can access through VA's network of urgent care providers in the community.
- For more information, visit www.missionact.va.gov.

For more information:

- VA news release – April 22, 2019: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/59215/vas-improvements-veteran-community-care-mission-act-track-june-6-implementation/>
- VA Vantage Point Blog – April 1, 2019: [New eligibility criteria a major improvement over existing rules](#)
- VA Vantage Point Blog – March 19, 2019: [VA MISSION Act: What is the latest on community care? How VA is transforming Veteran community care under the VA MISSION Act of 2018 and what to expect.](#)
- VA Vantage Point Blog – Feb. 11, 2019: [MISSION ACT 101: How the law will improve VA's ability to deliver health care to Veterans](#)

Jun 6—SFVAHCS 2nd Annual VA Baby Shower—DAV (1519 W. 51st Street) - Sioux Falls—6:00 pm (CT)
 Jun 6-9—American Legion State Convention—Sioux Falls Convention Center
 Jun 8—Department of SD Marine Corps League State Convention—American Legion Post 8—Pierre—10:00 am (CT)
 Jun 12—Sioux Falls Vet Center 40th Anniversary Open House—3:00 pm—5:00 pm (CT) - 3200 W. 49th Street
 Jun 12—Rapid City Vet Center 40th Anniversary Open House—2:00 pm—6:00 pm (MT) 621 6th Street—Suite 101
 Jun 13-16—VFW State Convention—Dakota State University—Madison
 Jun 8—Military/Veterans Canaries Appreciation Night—Sioux Falls—6:00 pm (CT)
 Jun 13—SFVAHCS Welcome Home Event—Main Lobby of Sioux Falls Medical Center—5:00—8:00 pm (CT)
 Jun 14—Flag Day
 Jun 15—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
 Jun 15—Tribute to Freedom—Honoring our Veterans—Eureka Sports Complex—10:30 am (CT)
 Jun 20—VABHCS Veterans Orientation Program (Building 53—Room 102) Hot Springs—4:30 pm (MT)
 Jun 29—Veterans for Veterans Annual Poker Run—Mitchell Depot Bar and Grill—11:00 am (CT)
 Jul 4—State Offices Closed
 Jul 17—South Dakota Veterans Council—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
 Jul 19-21—“Last Out” Performance—Thomas H. Craig Center for the Performing Arts—Vermillion High School—
 Show times 8:00 pm (CT) on 19-20 and 2:00 pm (CT) on 21st
 Jul 20—PVA 5th Annual Poker Run—Thirsty Duck Bar and Grill (945 S. Marion Road) - Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
 July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL
 Jul 20—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
 Aug 2—American Legion Highway 281 Centennial Run (ND/SD Border to SD/NE Border)
 Aug 3-6—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
 Aug 17—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
 Aug 17-18—Sioux Falls Air Show
 Aug 24—Wine and Gala Auction (MidWest Honor Flight Benefit) - Calico Skies Winery
 Aug 26—Sioux Falls Barrel House (MidWest Honor Flight Benefit - 10% all day to MWHF) - 4701 E 54th Street
 Aug 29—Veterans Day at the Fair
 Aug 26-29—SDDVA Benefit School
 Aug 31—15th Annual 727th Transportation/DAV Poker Run—Swiftel Center—Brookings
 Sep 21—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street) - 9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
 Sep 21—Davison County Veterans Wellness and Benefit Fair—Mitchell Corn Palace—8:00 am—4:30 pm (CT)
 Sep 21-22—SD American Legion Golf Tournament—Hartford Golf Course
 Nov 2—2nd Annual Hangar Dance (MidWest Honor Flight Benefit) - Mid America Museum of Aviation—Sioux City,
 IA—7:00 pm (CT)



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